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published in

Criminology & Criminal Justice

2007

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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citation for published version (APA)

Jones, T. (2007). [Review of: A. Crawford, S. Lister (2005) Plural Policing: The Mixed Economy of Visible Patrols in England and Wales]. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 7(1), 111-112.

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Book Review: Plural Policing: The Mixed Economy of Visible Patrols in England and Wales

Trevor Jones

Criminology and Criminal Justice 2007 7: 111

DOI: 10.1177/1748895807072481

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understand homicide. One hopes that she will apply her skills in exposition to other neglected criminological areas.

Adam Crawford, Stuart Lister, Sarah Blackburn and Jonathan Burnett
Plural Policing: The Mixed Economy of Visible Patrols in England and Wales
Bristol: Policy Press, 2005. 128 pp. £11.99
ISBN 1-86134-671-9 (pbk)

• Reviewed by Trevor Jones, Cardiff University, UK
DOI: 10.1177/1748895807072481

During the last three decades, the British policing landscape has been significantly changed by a series of major developments. In particular, it has been increasingly recognized that a plethora of state, commercial and voluntary bodies are now providing policing services. The funding of neighbourhood warden schemes, the introduction of Police Community Support Officers, the statutory licensing of commercial security and police accreditation of community safety officers, all demonstrate a growing acceptance on the part of government of the plural nature of contemporary policing. There have been important theoretical analyses about the wider implications of such developments (see, for example, Bayley and Shearing, 1996; Johnston and Shearing, 2002). However, until relatively recently, detailed empirical evidence about the extent and nature of 'plural policing' has been rather difficult to find.

Crawford et al.'s study makes an important contribution to addressing this gap in empirical data about plural policing. They conducted interviews with key stakeholders and a national survey of commercial security firms providing patrol services. They also carried out six detailed case studies of a range of plural policing forms to explore the dynamics of plural policing at the local level. A number of important findings are particularly relevant to policy-makers in the field. For example, there will be concern at the relatively high proportion (almost 40%) of commercial security firms that reported quite poor relationships with the local police, and the similar proportion of firms that predicted intensified competition with the police as a result of current reforms. The local case studies provided mixed findings. On the positive side, the research found evidence of effective partnership working in which well-co-ordinated plural policing bodies made a significant contribution to public reassurance and community safety in local areas. In particular, the researchers found evidence that in some areas, plural policing arrangements had fostered a sense of ownership among local people, made a positive contribution to community cohesion and facilitated the exchange of good practice between different types of policing body. Less positive findings concerned the uneven and patchy development of plural policing arrangements across the country. Some areas were characterized by a lack of co-ordination between policing bodies, with duplication and poor relationships between policing bodies undermining their effectiveness. A central issue concerns the need to develop new forms of governance to bring plural

policing arrangements under the oversight of democratic bodies. The authors highlight a number of potential benefits of plural policing, including the possibilities for enhanced security provision and more effective regulation of crime and disorder, and improvements in public reassurance and community cohesion. However, if pluralization continues in its current unregulated manner it poses the twin threats of ineffectiveness (through lack of co-ordination and growing duplication and competition between policing bodies) and inequity (in that richer areas can afford to buy in more policing than poorer ones). The Government has attempted to address the issue of governance by placing the public police in the position of regulators (the police now have the power to accredit commercial security or local authority personnel to work as Community Safety Officers). However, the authors rightly point out the tensions in this approach in that the police are simultaneously required to act as regulators of plural policing, and as competitors within the local 'market' for policing services. Following Loader (2000), the authors criticize the Government's 'police-focused' view of policing, and recommend the establishment of local and regional policing boards. These would have responsibility for oversight, co-ordination and regulation of a range of 'plural' policing services, and include significant 'democratic' input (presumably mainly comprising either appointed local government representatives or directly elected individuals). The advantages of this general approach would be that these bodies could act as 'honest brokers' over and above the (sometimes competing) bodies that constitute plural policing networks, and address the problems of co-ordination and unequal distribution.

This report is a particularly timely and important contribution to the current debate about the nature of contemporary policing and the direction of future reform. It provides empirical evidence about national trends in, and the local dynamics of, plural policing. On the whole it is well written and presented, and its recommendations are sensible and generally supported by the research. Some might criticize the rather descriptive nature of the report and the relative lack of theoretical analysis. However, this reflects the aim of the *Researching Criminal Justice* book series, which is to publish relatively short, policy-relevant research reports, rather than theoretically informed monographs. The authors have clearly succeeded in addressing this aim, providing policy-makers with much food for thought while at the same time making available useful data that can inform theoretically oriented debates about the future of policing.

References

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